

P E T E R S I R R

from *Don't hesitate*

I

Here is everything  
and you can't lose it

here the early morning sunlight archive  
numbered, itemised, set down

the laundry rampant in its basket  
here is the museum of bending down

here the breakfast gallery  
halal grocer and rained pavement annals

bus ticket trove, the chronicle of standing  
of the inhalation of perfume, of headlines

urgencies of the mobile phone  
eternally held, no thought erased

breath unexamined, no hair unturned, bone  
unpicked

labyrinths of the least machine  
here you are

locked forever  
in the Museum of Soviet Calculators

websites of forgotten code  
everything

somewhere  
its own monument: and already

they arrive  
the whitecoated, loving curators

the visitors filing past  
to wonder and be wondered at

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Cobalt door, yellow walls  
wooden frame where the name will go  
though still no name appears, the shelves are bare  
this halal temple grocer spicery  
sells winter and nervousness to the waiting street  
Next door in the off-licence I buy my paper  
from where the beans used to be, find  
the wine has moved, the coffee shifted, the counter  
is repositioned. They're ready for anything  
though still no-one comes  
It may never open, it may be  
the deal's fallen through, the tenant run away  
to Sark, to Lundy, to Sikkim

exactly now he is unrolling his blind  
and selling his first umbrella of the day  
while here people are travelling for miles  
to come away with one hand  
as long as the other, to enjoy the unfilled shelves  
and conjure names into the wooden frame.  
It could be theirs, this blue and yellow beacon  
this fading radio station whose signal  
keeps sending us home  
to change our lives, to move tables, chairs  
and sit on the floor in a great  
cleared space imagining the shelves  
of Athos, Punial, Andorra...

Such clarity: how  
the wind blows,  
the economy shrinks, disgrace

is everywhere; someone phones in, excited, it's  
the young, the old,  
foreigners with their hands stretched out;

today  
the cloned sheep is older than her years,  
arthritis flowering in her borrowed bones,

and the politician in his surprising cell  
is issued the standard ration  
of eggs, hash browns, toast and tea.

How many sugars? Milk or black?  
His faithful driver answers a hunger,  
gives us two fingers through the window

and takes off at speed; today  
knows this  
and takes equally in its stride

the archaeology of the toothbrush: lost  
cities thrive on a bristle  
and lie in wait; and still to come

the postman gunned down, the hurricane  
gravely climbing the ratings,  
the groomed voice

high above the tangled city  
which tells us  
repeatedly we're stuck, we're standing still,

the world announced all round us, the air  
heavy with answers; today's  
going nowhere

and not listening, today feels  
at the light's edge  
something stir, slow burn, today's

no-one, the guest  
without argument, speechless in the studio,  
nothing but a sweet blankness lodged in the bone.

## *Movements*

I  
portals  
of the possible, always open, always inviting.  
We go surfing the terraces  
in love with brick, doors tall  
beyond their station, fripperies of iron  
the dog pokes a curious head through  
Here lived  
Leopold Bloom, the house fades  
at the touch  
Here we press our noses against a bakery window  
hurrying bread  
browse rooftops, chimney pots  
someone dozing in the organ loft  
of what was a church  
*all the original ambience preserved*  
swans folded on the dark canal  
the dog leaping before us, attacking air  
He goes off sniffing importantly  
his night's on fire  
and dogs go off sniffing in us, and loping  
impatient cats, however we fold our necks  
and lie unmoving in a palm of water  
in our calm beds  
Here are athletes, fugitives

leashed and unleashed by the familiar  
here we look in on our ourselves and  
sniffing, concentrated, anxious  
move on  
but at home in the movement  
as we turn a corner  
into a loved street  
the width of it, the shape of its windows, how  
the night settles on it, and it reaches  
something angular, lamplit and night-sure in us  
and again  
past mosque, factory, park, vegetable shop  
*prices are born here*  
*and raised elsewhere*  
crossing and recrossing the canal  
who would have imagined  
this little square tucked out of sight  
carrying the whole lot on hods  
to build our house from it

2  
in early and in latter rain  
to be there  
and not perish  
the grass  
with'reth  
and the flower thereof  
blessed are they  
blessed are the dead  
and the waiting husbandman  
the heaped riches  
of the cathedral air  
of our bodies lost in this  
the music opens a giant crack  
and we leap in  
for a little while  
labour and sorrow  
and now

swallowed, winged, gladdened  
surely all our days  
surely some joy  
unconstrained  
come to rest  
in the continuing place

## *Office Hours*

The workers disappear into their buildings,  
the work itself falls through the air,  
sinks into corners, remembers itself.  
A notebook wakes up in a drawer;  
in a forgotten diary, under mounds of clutter,  
the umpteenth PAYE week of the year

is drawing to a close  
as early lunch floats up from the restaurant  
and rain pummels the fire-escape.  
Today's rain, last year's rain...  
the door opens  
and someone lumbers in

drenched in eighteenth-century rain,  
the rain of the great squares, Luke Gardiner's rain,  
the Earl of Drogheda's rain;  
stands there shaking the rain from his cloak  
wanting his lunch  
then crosses the chessboard flagstones

and approaches us, a large, fretful  
impatient gust.  
But we're impatient too  
and walk through him as through our own  
scurrying selves that come towards us  
with their stacks of paper and unmissable deadlines

and maybe one of them will stumble,  
lift his head, stall  
long enough to stare out a window  
and sing our lost labours  
in rooms for the never completed,  
for the ongoing review, the unfinished application,

the meeting still searching for a conclusion.  
The delicate letter weighs up its options,  
the fax we have been waiting for  
is coming through, the fax machine itself  
is on the way  
and though the diary's run out

and the taxes are paid  
our working lives continue  
in their own time, the cables are laid, the calls  
are put through to our desks again,  
our hands fallen into the air  
nonetheless persist...

\*

This is where they came:  
addressograph, adding machine,  
adhesive tape dispenser, even the ashtray.

Smoke fills the office and no-one  
bats an eyelid, they're busy  
with ball-point pens, box-files and bulldog clips

their thoughts are fixed on the slow clock,  
the clack of coat-hangers  
and consequential loss, the costs

of carbon paper and calendars.  
A clerk is searching in a drawer  
from which in time will emerge

a double-hole punch and a dry ink marker  
while someone with a big desk  
is speaking importantly into a dictaphone

and there's more to duty than drawing pins;  
an invoice rots in a folder, unsuspected,  
ungoverned, unforeseen, the list finder's

missing and the marginal lever  
appears to be broken.  
Someone reaches for paper clips,

someone is patiently removing staples  
from a statement: here, at last,  
is the single-hole punch,

a forest of treasury tags. All  
here is shortfall, a feast of stolen  
vetro-mobile files

and ghosts of effort disbelieving,  
leaning against the xerox  
staring at a bundle

of discarded safety statements:  
the trailing cables, the blocked  
access/egress routes,

the broken chair  
no-one has yet rendered secure  
pending disposal or repair

here is the uneliminated spillage,  
the unreported life, here  
are sandwiches, flasks, a language

pressed against a window staring out  
rubbing the steamed glass of the words  
to see what else is there



# Poem

Sail out from your harbour.  
Be my ambassador as I'll be yours  
though silent, without credentials  
and reporting nothing. Your voice pours in

the sea, the sun, every day's  
destination. You arrive late  
in the unmapped town, and no-one there  
or everyone, and everything

beheld and remembered. The notebooks fill: how  
the new boots grip and I miss  
the picture, lying back in a darkened room.  
Light sail into me

but very slowly, the clouds come down  
in their own time. From the heights,  
the precipices, your voice, last night's  
fire round which a whole world gathered

but this is it too, and I'm in it  
and like it. Shall I Fed-Ex  
a passing car, the radio left on downstairs?  
Or today's mission for supplies

to the same few streets but altered  
continually? It's as if  
the disk crashed, with nothing saved  
and every day begins with the crank

of promising machinery: slow boot-up,  
aches and buzzings giving way  
to a blue silence. I can send  
the date, the time, the objects considered each in its turn,

the silence that sits like a mountain  
between me and the door, and the pleasure  
of the slow climb over: the noise, the expectation,  
the city waiting like a liner...